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ABSTRACT

Studied with 93 gifted and 92 average elementary age students were social class and rural/urban differences in "futuring ability," defined as a "future-focused role image." Stanchions of Identity, an instrument developed by the author, requiring students to select a level of agreement with 41 positive statements on occupations, future world, friends, parents, and oneself, was used to measure futuring ability. It was found that average students attained significantly higher scores, indicating better futuring ability, than gifted students when the total groups were compared. Heterogeneous average rural students scored significantly higher than heterogeneous gifted rural students. No significant differences were found between other groupings of gifted, average, rural or urban students. Possible reasons for the unexpected findings include the possibility that gifted or urban children are more conscious of a wider range of future options and less likely to "strongly agree" with specific goals or future projections. (MH)

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FUTURING ABILITY AMONG WHITE APPALACHIAN GIFTED AND AVERAGE STUDENTS

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Introduction

Children in an economically deprived area lack many skills which would enable them to compete effectively in the middle-class mainstream of our culture. Future-focused role image (Singer, 1974) or more generally, futuring ability, appears to be among the deficiencies.

It is popularly held that a positive correlation exists between social class and futuring ability (Hollingshead, 1961). Lower class children are less able to project themselves into the future than higher class children (Le Shan, 1952). Conditions such as homogeneity of environment (Singer, 1974), unclear perception of future job (Rosenberg, 1957) and pessimistic attitudes (Teahan, 1958) are prevalent among the lower class and act to depress one's futuring ability.

The present study was undertaken to determine whether significant differences exist between the futuring ability of gifted and average students in urban upper middle classes and rural lower classes in Appalachia.

Hypotheses

Each of the hypotheses under consideration will be tested using the null hypotheses: H_0: $u_1 - u_2 = 0$

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In literary form, the,hypotheses state that no difference in futuring ability exist between:

Hypothesis I: gifted and average students

Hypothesis II: gifted rural and average rural students

Hypothesis III: homogeneous gifted rural and homogeneous average rural students

Hypothesis IV: heterogeneous gifted rural and heterogeneous average rural students

Hypothesis V: gifted urban and gifted rural students

Hypothesis VI: gifted urban and homogeneous average rural students

Hypothesis VII: gifted urban and heterogeneous average rural students

Hypothesis VIII: urban and rural students

Population and Setting

Gifted and average students were selected from four central and southern West Virginia counties. A brief description of counties and the sample n appear in table 1-1.

Table 1-1

Population Size and Sociological Description

County	Gifted n	Average	Sociological Description
Braxton	29	25	Homogeneous rural, predominantly middle to upper lower class, isolated
Roane	21	23	Homogeneous rural, predominantly middle to upper lower class, isolated
Lincoln	32	29	Heterogeneous rural, wide range of lower class to upper middle class
Cabell	11	15	Urban, lower to upper middle class

Average children are those placed in classes utilizing a traditional random process. Gifted in all districts are selected by a committee on the basis of individual psychoeducational evaluations.

Sampling

Gifted students in each of the three rural counties represent the total gifted population identified to date in those districts. Cabell County gifted students were selected as representative of the highest social stratum available among the gifted classes in this urban area.

Average students were randomly selected, by classroom, from all average classes available in the local district from which the gifted were identified.

Instrumentation

"Stanchions of Identity" (Schena, 1976) with a reported reliability of .78 was administered to each student. The instrument consists of 41 positive statements to which the student must select a level of agreement which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree (weighted 1-4). Each item is constructed to represent research findings of the necessary antecedents to futuring ability among the 5 major categories: occupation, future world, friends, parents, and oneself.

Administration took place during the regular school day in an untimed and informal atmosphere.

Analysis and Results

The t test for independent means was used to determine whether differences between groups were significant. Table 1-2 lists the critical values of the t tests computed for each of the eight hypotheses utilizing two-tailed tests.

Table 1-2

Results of t Test of Differences Between Mean Scores

	Hypothesis	df	t
I:	G - A = 0	178	-2.43*
II:	GR - AR = 0	152	-1.36
III:	H_oGR- H_oAR = 0	96	.21
IV:	H_eGR - H_eAR = 0	78	-3.51*
V:	GU - Gr = 0	91	- .27
VI:	GU - H_oAR = 0	57	- .35
VII:	GU - H_eAR = 0	33	-1.86
VIII:	U - R = 0	178	.38

Key: G = Gifted
R = Rural
A = Average
U = Urban
H_o = Homogeneous
H_e = Heterogeneous
*significant beyond .05 level

We failed to reject all hypotheses with the exception of numbers I and IV. We conclude in I that there is a difference between the futuring ability of gifted and average students. The average student attained significantly higher mean scores than the gifted. Concerning the differences between scores for hypothesis IV, we conclude that heterogeneous average rural mean scores are significantly higher than heterogeneous gifted rural.

Clearly, for the population here, average students possess greater futuring ability than gifted when comparing the total means of both groups and the means for the two groups in the heterogeneous school district.

Discussion

The results of this study appear to refute two popularly held positions on futuring ability. One, that lower class children have less clear future-focused role-image (Hollingshead, 1961) and two, that homogeneity of environment will depress futuring ability (Singer, 1974).

Children from the district labeled homogeneous average rural represent the most homogeneous and lowest social classes that exist in rural West Virginia. No significant differences were found between their scores and children from the upper middle classes in the state's largest city.

Accepted at face value, these findings force considerable rethinking concerning the impact of environment upon the futuring ability milieu.

Is it possible, for example, that children born into an im-

poverished, static, relatively uncontaminated social setting possess the same degree of futuring ability as their more sophisticated urban counterparts? We must respond in the negative on both an intuitive and cognitive level.

Perhaps explanation of these atypical results lay within the social-interaction theory of referent group formulation (Meltzer, 1959). From this point of view, we expect individuals to act-out the roles available in his social setting in order to become an accepted member of the group. More importantly for our discussion, this "self" evolves by acting (and being acted upon) within a set parameter of expected behaviors, attitudes and values. Naturally, the parameters of acceptable behavior may vary dramatically from group to group. Analogous to theories of deviance, the parameters are established by the in-group majority and hence are relative to that group.

In applying this theory to the present study, we would hypothesize that we sampled a student's perception of futuring ability as set within his social context. Thus, a "strongly agree" (score = 4) response illicited from a rural student may be equivalent to a smaller numerical score in the urban context due to the scope of options encompassed by urban parameters.

In a similar way, this would explain the gifted scoring significantly lower than average students. Being aware of more available options and the intricacies of attaining goals (as opposed to stating you have goals) may temper extremely high scores.

While the explanation is speculative at this point, we remain

convinced that real deficiencies do exist among the rural disadvantaged. Future studies should concern more effective delineation processes and corresponding instructional plans to assist these students. Controlling such variables as reference groups, significant others and goal attainment process awareness may result in more productive data.

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